

A Program Implementation for the Development of Life Skills of Primary School 4th Grade Students

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Abstract

Life skills are the competencies that an individual must have in order to be able to carry on his/her existence effectively in the process of change. By means of life skills, the individual is aimed to facilitate his/her life by using all his/her achievements in the education process. In this study, a program covering the dimensions of "Communication, Self-recognition, Self-confidence, being able to say "No", and Problem-Solving Skills" was developed and applied to the students who attended the 4th grade in Gölcük Barbaros Primary School in fall semester of the 2015-2016 academic year. In the study, undergraduate students of Guidance and Psychological Counseling program in Faculty of Education at Kocaeli University also worked as trainers. The trainers were trained by the faculty members in charge of the study. The study was conducted according to the experimental model and a five-session student life skills training program was applied to 247 (126 girls, 121 boys) students. The "Life Skills Assessment Form", which examines the skills aimed to be gained in the process of the project, has been implemented as a pretest-posttest by the teachers and the parents of students. As a result of the analyses made, it has been found that the program applied is effective. In addition, according to the results of evaluation forms taken from the students at the end of each session, the students evaluated the activities as fun, useful, and as activities where they both had fun and learnt.

Keywords: Life skills, Communication, Self-recognition, Self-confidence, Problem-Solving Skills

1. Introduction

Democratic societies have an important duty to provide a basic education to all their members so that they can lead an effective life. The state; by its social qualities, aims to enable its members to be liberated, to maintain their individuality, and to acquire the basic skills required to live together with its basic educational practices.

Children and adolescents are expected to cope with different compelling social situations they encounter. In order to manage social life successfully, it is necessary to have some life skills repertoire. Life skills are the basic skills that help children acquire the competences that are necessary to deal with the facts of life they will encounter. Life skills enable individuals to succeed in the environment they live in (Danish and Nellen, 1997). The concept of life skills widely used in fields such as education, health, and social policies includes a wide range of skills. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997), life skills may involve countless skills and the definition and the nature of life skills may vary according to the culture and the environment. The existence of many definitions of the concept of life skills makes it difficult to construct the conceptual framework (Hodge, Danish and Martin, 2013). Although there is lack of clarity on the definition of the concept of life skills, The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2003), defines life skills as a wide range of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that will help people make the right decisions to have a healthy and productive life, establish effective communication, and develop coping and self-control skills. WHO (1999) lists the skills of decision making and problem solving; creative and critical thinking; self-awareness and empathy; coping with emotions and stress; communication and interpersonal skills as the basic five life skills to be appropriate for all cultures. Danish and Donohue (1995) stated that life skills can be physical (such as having the right body posture), behavioral (such as effective communication), and cognitive (such as making effective decisions).

Social competence improved through education contributes to positive self-perception, independent decision making, healthy problem solving, effective communication skills, and constructive coping skills (Persha, 2007). Life skills education is seen as a complementary education to prepare individuals for daily challenges and risks and to be productive individuals in society. It is also thought to contribute significantly to the quality of education (UNICEF, 2012). Life skills education is a development program prepared to contribute to individual, social, academic, professional and moral development (Kolburan and Tosun, 2011). Life skills education is used to reduce risk factors for individuals and to support preventive factors (Davasligil, Çakıcı and Ögel, 1998). According to UNICEF (2012), life skills can be given in different ways at schools. It can be given, for example, as a new course, or as a supplement to different levels in teaching practice or by including it in the content of other courses. In some cases, it can also be presented as an extracurricular activity.

Primary education, the first step in compulsory education, aims to provide students with the basic skills necessary to solve the problems they face and to comply with social norms. Among the anticipated skills to be provided to children and primary school students, are communication, problem solving, decision-making, self-

management, cooperation and team work, leadership and entertainment (Ministry of National Education, 2006). These skills can also be expressed as life skills in a sense.

Life skills are skills and knowledge that are necessary for an effective life and different from academic skills. Life skills reduce stigmatization and embarrassment by avoiding diagnosis and labeling. Students will be more interested in new experiences by learning how to deal with life. It is considered that having knowledge about life skills will have positive effects on students in the particular age group to cope with problems and hardships they encounter, especially when considering their perception of life and their life expectancies.

It is also assumed that it will be particularly effective in raising students' awareness and reducing adaptation time during transition from one educational level to the other. In this study, 5 of life skills will be discussed. These are; Communication, Self-recognition, Self-confidence, Being able to say "No", and Problem Solving Skills.

The ability of a person to maintain a healthy life is related to being able to be both himself/herself and to live together with others. In this context, individuals need to acquire the necessary life skills. The ability of individuals to have these gains is related to whether they have passed through an education in which healthy living skills can be earned. With this study, it was aimed to give the students the life skills which are the competencies they have to possess in order for the individuals to be able to effectively sustain their presence in the life process. Within the scope of the study, it was aimed to develop skills by creating awareness with activities and trainings towards these skills to be provided to the students at a time when basic attainments in the students are met.

2. Method

2.1 Research Model

The research is the implementation of a program experiment aimed at giving students in the fourth grade of elementary school the life skills of Communication, Self-recognition, Self-confidence, being able to say "No" and Problem-solving. The research is a pilot study in which the application of the prepared program is carried out and with this respect; it has the pre-experimental design characteristics. Pre-experimental designs are not considered as an experimental model such as true experimental models, but they give clues about the effects of the dependent variable in a study where there is no control group or in a pilot study before the pre-experimental designs (Karasar, 2012).

2.2 Participants

Within the scope of the study, Barbaros primary school located in the district of Gölcük, in the province of Kocaeli within the Ministry of National Education was chosen and the studies were carried out in this school in order to handle life skills in a holistic structured program. While designating the school, attention was paid to choose a school with disadvantages in terms of socioeconomic status. Gender and age distributions of the students participating in the study are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants By Gender And Age

Gender	f	%
Boy	121	48.99
Girl	126	51.01
Total	247	100.00
Age		
8	9	3.83
9	111	47.23
10	110	46.81
11	5	2.13
Total	235	100.00

As seen in Table 1, it is observed that the genders of the students included in the study are equally distributed and their ages are mostly 9 and 10. The educational statuses of the parents of the students are given in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 2. Distribution of Participants by Maternal Educational Status

Educational Status	f	%
Illiterate	18	7.35
Primary school graduates	101	41.22
Secondary school graduates	50	20.41
High school graduates	67	27.35
University graduates	9	3.67
Master/PhD graduates	0	0.00
Total	245	100.00

Table 3. Distribution of Participants According to Paternal Educational Status

Educational Status	f	%
Illiterate	6	2.49
Primary school graduates	64	26.56
Secondary school graduates	47	19.50
High school graduates	93	38.59
University graduates	29	12.03
Master/PhD graduates	2	0.83
Total	241	100.00

When Table 2 and Table 3 are examined, it is seen that the educational statuses of the parents of the students who participated in the study differ as is the case in the whole country; It is seen that almost 70% of the mothers of the students have primary school degree at the highest, and almost 70% of the fathers have at least secondary school degree. The distribution of income of the families is given in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution by the Income Status of the Families

Income Status (TL)	f	%
0-800	35	14.58
801 - 1500	97	40.42
1501 - 2500	75	31.25
2501 - 3500	21	8.75
3501 - 4500	10	4.17
4501- ...	2	0.83
Total	240	100.00

It was found that more than half of the families had an income below 1500 TL, with only less than 1% with a salary above 4500 TL.

2.3 Trainers in the Project

In the study, primarily the training of trainers was carried out. The 9 trainers to take part in this project were chosen from junior and senior year students from Guidance and Psychological Counseling Department in Faculty of Education at Kocaeli University. Those trainers were trained by the faculty members of the Faculty of Education and the program for the performed project was developed after the training.

2.4 The Implemented Training Program

The developed program covers the dimensions of "Communication, Self-recognition, Self-confidence, being able to say "No", "Problem Solving Skills". The program consists of 5 modules, each of which is administered in 2 class hours. Throughout the project, a 5-session life skills program was implemented to a total of 10 groups (classes). Activities for life skills were carried out within the school, which is determined by appropriate methods and techniques. In addition, prior to the implementation of the life skills program, a 2-hour briefing meeting about the contents and the target of the program was held with the teachers in order to increase the permanence of the skills. In this meeting, information was given considering what the teachers can do to support the targeted skills and their support was obtained. In addition, before the program the students' families were given 2-hour awareness training about the contents, the purpose of the program and what they can do at home in order to be able to transfer the targeted skills to all areas of life, especially the home environment. After the completion of the program, another meeting was held to ensure the permanence of the skills aimed at the students' families and to assess the effectiveness of the implemented program.

2.5 Data Collection Tools

In the study, a 20-item "Life Skills Assessment Form" was used to determine the life skills of the students. In addition, a three-question evaluation form was developed to get feedback from the students. The Life Skills Assessment Form was applied to the classroom teachers and the families at the beginning and at the end of the activities. Data on the life skills of the students were collected from the parents and the teachers and interviews were held with the teachers and the students to evaluate the activities. In the analysis of the data, descriptive statistics, T test for repeated measurements and descriptive analyzes in qualitative data were used.

3. Findings

In the study, before the program consisting of 5 modules, the classroom teachers of 10 different groups were asked to evaluate their students in terms of "Communication, Self-Recognition, Self-Confidence, being able to say "No", "Problem-Solving" life skills subject to the project and they were asked to re-evaluate their students after the program as a result of certain observations and interactions. Descriptive statistics of life skills of 210 students assessed by the teachers other than data loss are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Life Skills (Teacher Evaluation)

Statistics	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Mean	39.70	44.67
Median	41.00	48.50
Minimum	20.00	22.00
Maximum	58.00	60.00
Range	38	38
Standard Deviation	11.65	13.23
Variance	135.78	175.02
Skewness	-0.199	-0.217
Kurtosis	-1.449	-1.535

As shown in Table 5, life skills' mean of the students was 39.70 in the pre-test and 44.67 in the post-test. In the pre and post application, the lowest and highest scores obtained from the 20-item 3-point form were determined as 20, 58 and 22, 60 respectively. In both applications, the range was found as 38. Before and after the program, the life skills of the students in the pre and post-test were examined to see whether they differed and the results are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of T Test between Pre and Post-test Scores of the Students

Test	N	X	S	SD	t	p
pre-test	210	39.70	11.65			
post-test	210	44.67	13.23	209	12.984	.000

As seen in Table 6, there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the students' pre-and post-test life skill scores [$t_{(209)} = 12.984$; $p = 0.00$]. The eta square value showing the influence quantity was 0.68. When the means are examined, it is seen that this difference in the means is in favor of the post-test. Although the increase in the life skill levels of the students in the post application does not exactly show the efficiency of the program in the pre-experimental model, it gives clues as to the fact that it may have an effect. In order to support the teachers' evaluations, data was also collected from the students' families through the same form. Descriptive statistics of the parents' evaluations of their children before and after the program are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of the Life Skills of the Students (Family Evaluation)

Statistics	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Mean	43.13	50.71
Median	45.00	53.00
Minimum	21.00	29.00
Maximum	58.00	60.00
Range	37.00	31.00
Standard Deviation	8.01	7.66
Variance	64.23	58.61
Skewness	-0.874	-1.126
Kurtosis	0.336	0.277

As a result of the evaluation of the parents, the life skills' mean of the students were found as 43.13 after the pre-test. According to the evaluations of the families after the program, the mean of the students was obtained as 50.71. The lowest and highest scores were obtained as 21, 58 and 29, 60, respectively. The comparison of the level of the life skills of the students before and after the program showed that the difference between the pre- and post-test scores was significant and the findings are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Results of T Test between Pre and Post-test Scores of the Students

Test	N	X	S	SD	t	p
pre-test	91	43.13	8.01			
post-test	91	50.71	7.66	90	5.917	.000

As a result of the analysis, a significant difference was found between the students' life skills' mean scores in the pre- and post-tests [$t_{(91)} = 5.917$; $p = 0.00$]. The calculated eta square value was obtained as 0.28. It is seen that the difference between the means seems to be in favor of the post-test scores. Although it is not the only factor, it gives a clue that the applied program may increase the life skills of the students in the process. In the program carried out with 5 modules, after each module, information was gathered at the end of each activity as to whether the students enjoyed the activities, found the activities useful and their learning levels.

When the students indicate their enjoyment of the activities conducted, they expressed their views with answers such as "I had fun", "I neither had fun nor got bored", and "I got bored"; for cases where the activity was found useful "I think it is useful", "I think it is neither useful nor not useful" and "I find it is not useful"; for

learning situations "I learned a lot", "I learned some" and "I did not learn anything". Findings for 5 different modules are presented below.

The distribution of the opinions of the students regarding the activity for the skill of saying no is given in Table 9.

Table 9. Student Opinions Regarding the Activity for the Skill of Saying No

Class	I had fun	I neither had fun nor got bored	I got bored	TOTAL	I think it is useful			I think it is neither useful nor not useful			I did not learn anything		
					I find it is not useful	TOTAL	I learned a lot	I learned some	TOTAL	I learned a lot	I learned some	TOTAL	
4A	24	0	0	24	23	1	0	24	19	4	1	24	
4B	22	1	1	24	20	2	2	24	21	2	1	24	
4C	16	2	1	19	15	3	1	19	14	2	3	19	
4D	14	3	6	23	16	3	4	23	13	3	6	22	
4E	17	1	2	20	18	2	0	20	15	4	1	20	
4F	23	0	0	23	23	0	0	23	22	1	0	23	
4G	25	1	0	26	25	1	0	26	24	1	1	26	
4H	11	8	5	24	13	7	3	23	14	6	3	23	
4I	20	0	0	20	18	2	0	20	17	1	2	20	
4I	23	0	0	23	23	0	0	23	22	1	0	23	
Total	195	16	15	226	194	21	10	225	181	25	18	224	

The opinions of the students in 10 different groups in which the activities were carried out were analyzed descriptively at the end of the activity of saying no. Considering the sum of the number of students from whom the data was collected, 86.28% of the students said they had fun in the activity, 86.22% of the students found the activity useful, and 80.80% of the students said they learned a lot. Student opinions on the activity for the self-recognition skill are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Student Opinions on the Activity for the Self-Recognition Skill

Class	I had fun	I neither had fun nor got bored	I got bored	TOTAL	I think it is useful			I think it is neither useful nor not useful			I did not learn anything		
					I find it is not useful	TOTAL	I learned a lot	I learned some	TOTAL	I learned a lot	I learned some	TOTAL	
4A	23	1	0	24	23	1	0	24	24	0	0	24	
4B	16	6	2	24	22	2	0	24	18	4	2	24	
4C	16	1	0	17	16	1	0	17	14	3	0	17	
4D	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
4E	23	0	0	23	22	0	1	23	20	1	2	23	
4F	23	0	0	23	23	0	0	23	22	1	0	23	
4G	23	0	0	23	23	0	0	23	22	1	0	23	
4H	18	1	2	21	17	4	0	21	17	4	0	21	
4I	16	0	2	18	17	1	0	18	17	1	0	18	
4I	21	1	1	23	21	0	2	23	20	2	1	23	
Total	179	10	7	196	184	9	3	196	174	17	5	196	

As shown in Table 10, in total 91.32% of the students reported that they enjoyed themselves during the activity of self-recognition, 93.88% found the activity useful, and 88.77% learned much from the activity. Student opinions on the activity for the communication skill are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Student Opinions on the Activity for the Communication Skill

Class	I had fun	I neither had fun nor got bored	I got bored	TOTAL	I think it is useful	I think it is neither useful nor not useful	I find it is not useful	TOTAL	I learned a lot	I learned some	I did not learn anything	TOTAL
4A	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4B	21	2	1	24	24	0	0	24	19	4	1	24
4C	17	4	1	22	21	0	1	22	18	4	0	22
4D	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4E	20	4	1	25	23	2	0	25	18	5	2	25
4F	19	0	0	19	19	0	0	19	17	2	0	19
4G	25	2	0	27	27	0	0	27	26	1	0	27
4H	19	3	1	23	19	3	1	23	16	3	1	20
4I	19	0	0	19	19	0	0	19	19	0	0	19
4I	21	1	1	23	20	3	0	23	21	1	1	23
Total	161	16	5	182	172	8	2	182	154	20	5	179

No data on this activity was collected from two groups of the total 10 groups in which the program was conducted and these groups were excluded from the analysis. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that 88.46% of the students found the activity as fun, 94.50% found the activity useful and 86.03% learned much from the activity. Student opinions on the self-confidence skill activity are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Student Opinions on the Activity for the Self-Confidence Skill

Class	I had fun	I neither had fun nor got bored	I got bored	TOTAL	I think it is useful	I think it is neither useful nor not useful	I find it is not useful	TOTAL	I learned a lot	I learned some	I did not learn anything	TOTAL
4A	23	0	1	24	23	1	0	24	20	2	1	23
4B	19	2	3	24	18	4	2	24	18	6	0	24
4C	16	4	2	22	17	3	1	21	16	4	2	22
4D	12	5	10	27	11	9	6	26	7	14	6	27
4E	21	2	2	25	22	3	0	25	19	2	4	25
4F	23	0	0	23	23	0	0	23	21	1	1	23
4G	19	1	4	24	20	1	3	24	20	1	3	24
4H	19	4	2	25	20	5	0	25	16	7	2	25
4I	11	1	12	24	15	5	4	24	9	9	6	24
4I	23	0	0	23	23	0	0	23	22	1	0	23
Total	186	19	36	241	192	31	16	239	168	47	25	240

When student opinions are taken into consideration, it attracts the attention that two groups in particular (4D and 4I) are not satisfied with the activities and give negative feedback. It was determined that 77.17% of the total students found that the activity of self-confidence was fun, 80.33% said the activity was useful, and 70.00% said that they learned a lot. After the teacher and student opinions, it was thought that the negative thoughts in the two groups might be mostly due to the fact that the class was more active and talkative. Student opinions on the problem-solving skill activity are given in Table 13.

Table 13. Student Opinions on the Activity for the Problem Solving Skill

Class	I had fun	I neither had fun nor got bored	I got bored	TOTAL	I think it is useful			I think it is neither useful nor not useful			I did not learn anything			TOTAL
					I think it is useful	I think it is neither useful nor not useful	I find it is not useful	I learned a lot	I learned some	I did not learn anything				
4A	22	1	0	23	23	0	0	23	21	2	0	23		
4B	19	4	2	25	23	2	0	25	18	6	1	25		
4C	16	4	0	20	18	2	0	20	17	2	1	20		
4D	13	3	3	19	13	4	2	19	11	7	1	19		
4E	17	4	4	25	20	2	3	25	14	4	6	24		
4F	20	0	0	20	21	0	0	21	21	0	0	21		
4G	19	3	4	26	22	1	3	26	21	1	4	26		
4H	6	8	11	25	12	10	3	25	8	12	5	25		
4I	11	6	5	22	16	3	3	22	10	6	6	22		
4J	23	1	1	25	23	1	1	25	23	1	1	25		
Total	166	34	30	230	191	25	15	231	164	41	25	230		

As seen in Table 13, it was found that in total 72.17% of the students found the activity to be fun, 82.68% found the activity useful, and 71.30% learned much from the activity.

Considering all the activities, it is seen that the majority of the students are satisfied with the implemented program and they express a positive opinion. The qualitative data from obtained from the students support this. As a result of the analyses, it was determined that regarding the enjoyment of the students in the activity (based on the frequencies stated above), students frequently made such explanations as "I had fun because I learned a lot in the same activity", "all the things we learned were enjoyable", "We made very nice activities", "it was very enjoyable and thought-provoking", "I had a great time", "It was very entertaining and funny", "We performed dramas and I had a lot of fun" and so on; regarding whether the activity was useful, they made such explanations as "I could not write poems or stories or draw pictures before but now I can...", "I learned to share", "today it was both productive and fun", "I think we have improved ourselves", "being together and not offending my friends", "I have self-confidence, I have succeeded", "I didn't get bored and I improved my skill" and so on; regarding learning, they made such explanations as "I learned things I didn't know before", "for instance I learned not to behave rude", "It has given me a lot", "We learned to say no", "I learned to be nice and honest", "I learned togetherness", "I learned to be quiet when a friend is talking", "I learned a lot because the activity was performed every week", "it's very nice and I learned mind-opening things", "I learned how to say no and protect myself", "I learned how to say sorry without fear" and so on. However, it is seen that in line with the distributions above, the students who are not satisfied with the activities made such explanations as "I am very bored", "I had fun but I did not like the picture poetry and story very much", "my friends got very naughty", "I did not learn anything", "very embarrassing", "I did not have much fun but it was nice", "We could not do the activity because everybody was talking", "It was not enjoyable at all", "there was not much to learn", "things I don't like", "I did not understand because all my friends were talking" and so on.

3. Conclusion and Discussion

It is seen in the literature that life skills programs are prepared more for adolescents (Mofrad, 2013, Güvenç and Aktas, 2006, Sefer and Akfirat, 2009). UNICEF also mainly considers adolescents as a target audience for life skills (UNICEF, 2012). In this project, the life skills program was implemented at an earlier age (primary school 4th grade). It can be said that the project results are effective in this context. However, it is also necessary to conduct follow-up studies for the permanence of the skills.

This project was also very effective for the senior students of Guidance and Psychological Counseling program in Faculty of Education at Kocaeli University. It can be said that they have developed their professional skills in terms of putting the scientific knowledge learned theoretically in the program they attended into practice.

In this project, a training program which can also be used in later studies has been developed and tested. The fact that such a program has been developed can also be considered as the achievement of the project.

Different conclusions about the effects of life skills training are found. Some studies (Johnson, Shamblen, Ogilvie, Collins and Saylor, 2009; Luna-Adame et al., 2013; Mandel, Bialous and Glantz, 2006; Spoth, Trudeau,

Shin and Redmond, 2008; Smith et al., 2004), as reported by Gazioglu and Canel (2015) reported that they do not really have preventive effects whereas other studies (Botvin et al., 2003; Fraguera, Martin and Trinanes, 2003; Griffin, Botvin, Nichols and Doyle, 2003; Seal, 2006) showed that they have positive effects. Some research results (Botvin, Baker, Filazzola et al., 1990; Botvin, Baker, Dusenbury et al., 1990, 1995, Botvin et al., 2000) showed that the training also had long-term effects in the follow-up studies. For instance, Buhler, Schroder, and Silbereisen (2008) developed a program of prevention life skills against substance abuse for the fifth grade students. The program focused on 8 general life skills in relation to substance use; self-awareness, empathy, creativity, critical thinking, communication, interpersonal relationships, decision-making, problem solving, coping with stress and emotions. The research results show that the program is significantly effective in deferring smoking and alcohol use. It can be said that the program is effective according to the feedback from the class teachers and the families of the students. Furthermore, when the results of the evaluations obtained from the students at the end of each session are examined, it can be said that the life skills program implemented has improved the awareness of the skills to be acquired by the students.

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